



The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center

News of Terrorism and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict (November 17-22, 2010)



Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip escalates. Left: Site of the mortar shell hit near an army base (Picture courtesy of Israeli Channel 10 TV, November 19, 2010). Right: Site of the Grad rocket hit (Photo by Yehuda Lahiani, courtesy of NRG, November 19, 2010).

Overview

- This past week four rockets (including one Grad rocket) and six mortar shell (including a shell containing phosphorous) were used to attack the western Negev. The exceptional rocket fire was apparently in response to the killing of Islam Yassin, an operative of the global jihad-affiliated Army of Islam, who was involved in planning a terrorist attack in Sinai. Following the rocket fire the Israeli Air Force attacked a number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip.
- In the political sphere contacts were maintained between Israel and the United States and deliberations continued inside the Israeli political arena about signing an agreement for a package of American incentives in return for a three-month construction freeze in the settlements. The Palestinians insist that the freeze include all of Judea and Samaria and East Jerusalem.

Important Terrorism Events

Gaza Strip

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

■ During this past week there was an exceptional increase in rocket fire (including a standard Grad rocket) and mortar shell fire targeting the western Negev. The attacks were apparently in response to the killing of Islam Yassin, an Army of Islam operative involved in planning an abduction in the Sinai Peninsula. A total of four rocket and six mortar shell hits were identified in the western Negev. Unsuccessful rocket fire attacks were also attempted.

■ The rocket attacks were the following:

- On **November 16** a rocket hit was identified in an open area in the western Negev . There were no casualties and no damage was done.
- On **November 19 three rocket hits were identified**. One was a **122mm Grad rocket, the first fired** since Operation Cast Lead. There were no casualties. Animals and property were damaged.

■ During the week **six mortar shells** were used to attack towns and villages in the western Negev. All fell in open areas. There were no casualties and no damage was done. **At least one of the mortar shells contained phosphorous**.

■ It was not the first time the terrorist organizations used mortar shells containing phosphorous. On September 15, 2010, the day after the summit meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh,¹ the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip launched a number of rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory (approximately 10). **At least two of them were 120mm mortar shells, one of them containing white phosphorous**. There were no casualties and no damage was done.

■ A global jihad-affiliated network calling itself "The Supporters of the Sunnah in the Wings of Jerusalem" and the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for the mortar shell fire (IDF Spokesman's website, Ynet, Popular Resistance Committees website, November 19, 2010; Shamuh al-Islam forum website, November 20, 2010).).

¹ After the direct negotiations were launched in Washington on September 14, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas in Sharm el-Sheikh. Also present were Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Special US Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell.

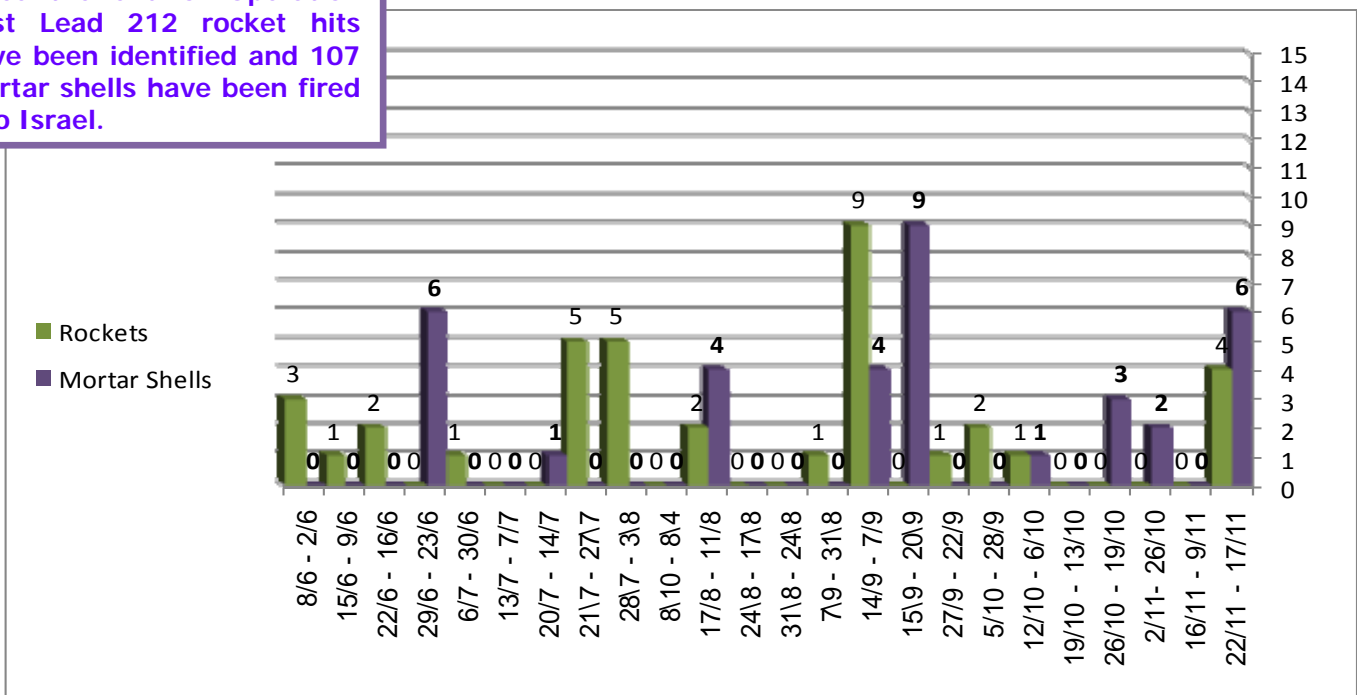
■ The Israeli ambassador to the United Nations lodged an official protest with the UN Secretary General concerning the rocket fire and use of phosphorous-containing shells. However, a spokesman for the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip denied the use of phosphorous (Hamas administration foreign ministry website, November 19, 2010; Hamas' Al-Quds TV, November 20,2010).



Site of the mortar shell hit near an army base
(Picture courtesy of Israeli Channel 10 TV, November 19, 2010)

Rocket and mortar shells fired into Israeli territory²

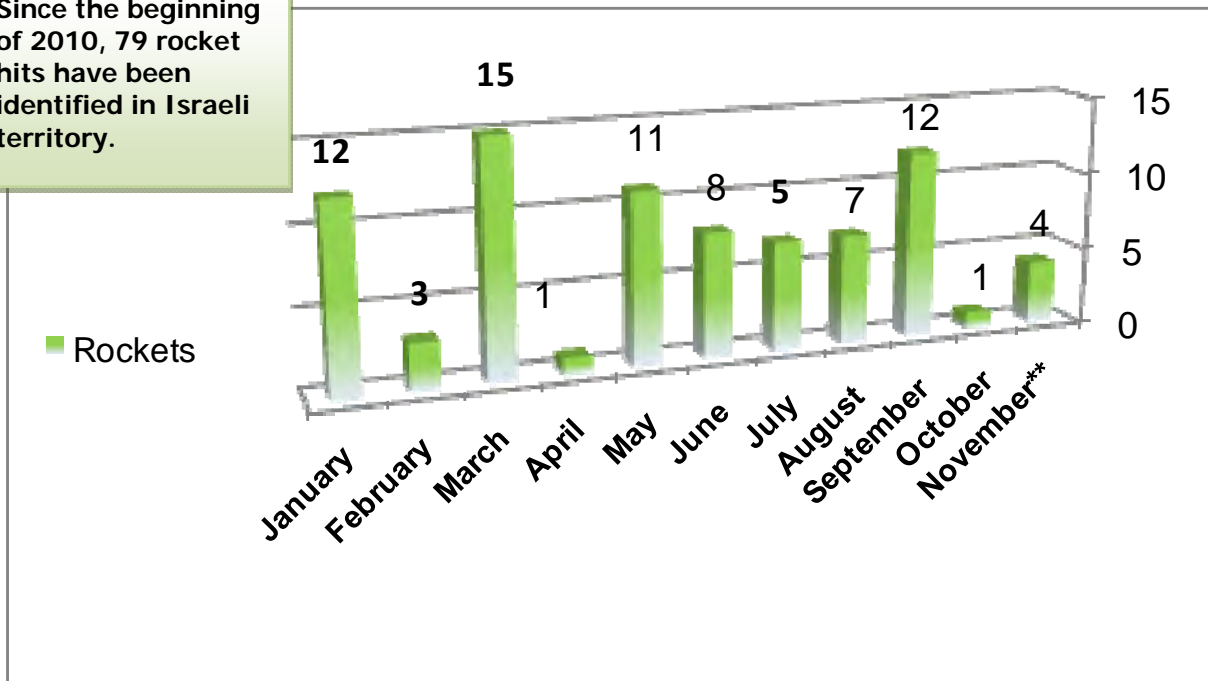
Since the end of Operation Cast Lead 212 rocket hits have been identified and 107 mortar shells have been fired into Israel.



² The statistics do not include the mortar shells fired at IDF soldiers patrolling the border fence which fell inside the Gaza Strip.

Rocket Fire 2010, Monthly Distribution*

Since the beginning of 2010, 79 rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory.



* Rocket hits identified in Israeli territory. A similar number misfire and customarily land inside the Gaza Strip.

** As of November 22, 2010.

Israeli Air Force attacks

■ On November 20, following the rocket fire, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip, including a tunnel. Palestinian sources reported four wounded.



Two of the terrorist targets hit by the Israeli Air Force
(Pictures courtesy of Israeli Channel 10 TV, November 19, 2010)

Targeted Killing of an Army of Islam Operative

■ On November 17 there was an air strike targeting **Islam Yassin**, a senior operative of the Army of Islam, a network in the Gaza Strip affiliated with the global jihad; he was the network leader's right-hand man. Islam Yassin and his brother were killed. **According to the IDF Spokesman, Yassin was planning an abduction in the Sinai Peninsula** (IDF Spokesman's website, November 17, 2010). On November 3 Muhammad al-Nimnim was killed, also a senior operative in the Army of Islam, who had been involved in carrying out attacks from the Gaza Strip and in planning attacks in the Sinai.



Islam Yassin's car after the attack
(Aljazeeraatalk.net, November 19, 2010)

Reports of Hamas Action against the Rocket Launchers

■ According to information from a Fatah forum, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, is hunting for two rogue operatives who on November 18 transferred four Grad rockets, two Qassams and a number of mortar shells to a network calling itself "The Group of the Unity of Allah and Jihad." According to the report, the operatives wanted to enable the network to "respond to Israel's recent attacks," i.e., the killing of Muhammad al-Nimnim and Islam Yassin (Website of the Yasser Arafat Fatah forum, November 19, 2010). "Palestinian sources in the Gaza Strip," who remained anonymous, confirmed that Hamas did not want rocket fire and appealed to rocket launching groups to stop (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 21, 2010).

Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism Activities

- This past week the IDF carried out routine counterterrorism activities, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity (IDF Spokesman's website, November 21, 2010).
- During the week there were a number of attacks involving stones thrown at Israeli vehicles:

- **November 21** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle southwest of Ramallah. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman's website, November 22, 2010).
 - **November 20** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was done ((IDF Spokesman's website, November 20, 2010).
 - **November 18** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Ramallah. An Israeli civilian sustained minor injuries. The vehicle was damaged. Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle and bus near Bethlehem. There were no casualties but the vehicles were damaged (IDF Spokesman's website, November 18, 2010).
 - **November 17** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Bethlehem. There were no casualties and no damage was done (IDF Spokesman's website, November 17, 2010).
- The Palestinian Authority security services detained a group of Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives whose activity was centered around Nablus and who planned to carry out a number of terrorist attacks. The attacks allegedly included an attempt to assassinate the Nablus governor, the abduction of Israeli settlers and a terrorist attack in Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority security services confiscated money and weapons found in the operatives' possession (Ma'an News Agency, November 17, 2010).

The Peace Process

Continuing the Negotiations and Freezing Construction in the Settlements

- Israel and the United States continued contacts to formulate a written proposal for the American package of incentives Israel would receive in return for freezing construction in the settlements. Senior figures in the Palestinian Authority had the following to say about the package:
- Palestinian Authority Chairman **Mahmoud Abbas**, after having met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, said that he did not think the Americans had already offered the package to Israel and that he himself had not seen its terms. **He repeated that the construction freeze had to include all of Judea, Samaria and East Jerusalem**, and again claimed that if the building continued the Palestinians could not continue negotiating (Wafa News Agency, November 21, 2010).

- **Abu Rudeina**, Mahmoud Abbas' spokesman, said that "the Palestinians do not want the Palestinian channel to serve as an excuse for the United States to provide Israel with weapons" (Wafa News Agency, November 18, 2010).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Crossings

- Since the decision was made by the Israeli government in June 2010 to ease the closure of the Gaza Strip, the Kerem Shalom crossing has been altered to accommodate almost double the volume of trucks. **The Palestinians do not currently exploit the crossing's capabilities fully.** Since August 2010, when construction on the crossing was completed, **an average of 176 trucks has entered the Gaza Strip every day**, 500 of which have carried building materials for projects authorized by the Palestinian Authority (Website of the Israeli government coordinator for the territories, November 18, 2010).

Flotillas and Convoys to the Gaza Strip – Update

The British Road to Hope Convoy on Its Way to the Gaza Strip

- Some ten of the activists from **the British convoy calling itself the "Road to Hope,"** who were abducted last week to Greece by the captain of the ship they had tried to rent, were released by the Greek coast guard. Those who were left in Libya managed to rent another ship and after the released abductees returned from Greece they set sail for the port of El Arish (Road to Hope website, November 22, 2010).

Lebanon

Negative Reactions in Lebanon to Israeli Government Decision to Withdraw from the Village of Ghajar

- On November 17 Israel's ministerial security committee decided in principle to accept the September 2, 2010 proposal of the UN and the UNIFIL commander to withdraw from the northern part of the village of Ghajar to complete its withdrawal from Lebanon (in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701).

■ The Lebanese government and Hezbollah greeted the Israeli decision with suspicion. **Some also said that it would be incomplete if Israel did not also withdraw from the Shebaa Farms.**

- **Sources close to the Lebanese government**, who remained anonymous, claimed they had not yet received information from UNIFIL about the details of the expected withdrawal and that **the Lebanese government would not regard the withdrawal as complete until Lebanese forces deployed in the village, and until Israel evacuated other Lebanese territory [i.e., the Shebaa Farms] and ceased flyovers in Lebanese air space** (*Jerusalem Post*, November 20, 2010).

- **Hussein Khalil**, political advisor to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, said that despite the withdrawal "Hezbollah still needs weapons," **and that Israel still held the Shebaa Farms and the hills of the village of Shuba** (*Al-Arabiya TV*, November 20 2010).

- **Mohammad Ra'ad**, a Hezbollah faction member in the Lebanese Parliament, called the Israeli decision "'a trick cooked up at night with the UN and its secretary general' to show that Israel was implementing UN resolutions" (*Lebanese Daily Star*, November 22, 2010).

- **Omar Mussawi**, responsible for Hezbollah's public relations, demanded that Israel withdraw not only from Ghajar, but **from the Shebaa Farms**, and that it "stop its military operations...against Lebanese civilians" (*Al-Masri Al-Yawm*, November 18, 2010).

■ Residents of Ghajar expressed dissatisfaction with the decision and said they hoped it would not be implemented. They complained that no one had consulted them about the withdrawal and expected it to create a series of problems (*AP*, November 20, 2010; *Ynet*, November 18, 2010).